



AN
ADDRESS

DELIVERED ON OCCASION OF

The Raising of the National Flag,

UPON THE

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ALBANY,

ON MONDAY, JUNE 17, 1861.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.



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ADDRESS.

The raising of our national flag is an every day matter—the displaying of it from a *church*, not quite so common. But I should certainly think it a very dubious sort of patriotism, that should even suggest a doubt as to the propriety of what we are doing ; though, if such a doubt were to be actually put forth, I should expect it would be on one of two grounds—either that such a banner, displayed in such a place, would seem to betoken some sympathy with that theory which brings the Church into a relation of dependence on the State ; or else that it looks too much, at this time, like making peaceable, benevolent Christianity the patroness of war. Let me devote a single moment to each of these points.

As to the *union of Church and State*, in the common acceptation of that phrase, the flag, now waving above us, does not even look towards its vindication. It does indeed recognise the existence of a *certain* relation between the civil and the ecclesiastical ; but it repudiates that relation that subordinates the Church to the world,—robbing it of that liberty wherewith Christ makes his disciples free. It acknowledges the right and the duty of the civil magistracy to throw a protecting wing over the rights and the interests of all denominations, but it forbids the singling out of any one as the object of special favour ; while, on the other hand, it makes it incumbent on the Church to exert herself in every legitimate way in aid of the well being of civil society. Those who make the flag, which we have just unfurled, deliver a higher Church and State doctrine than this, only pervert her utterances and cast a shade upon her honour.

And as to the other objection, that the flag, taken in connection with the spirit of the times, looks *too warlike* to be suffered to float from one of the citadels of the Prince of Peace, I would say that it actually floats in *homage* to the Prince of Peace ; inasmuch as it is the emblem of loyalty to a cause in which are pre-eminently bound up the interests of a pure Christianity. With the government under which we have been reared has been identified the largest measure of religious liberty that any people has ever enjoyed ; and, under the influence of this matchless boon, has been developed an amount of Christian intelligence and activity, and I may add, heroic self-denial and endurance, that forms the subject of one of the brightest pages of our national history. In prosecuting the contest, then, in which we are now engaged, for the maintenance of our Government, we are carrying forward a struggle for peace in a two-fold sense ; not only to drive the demon of war into the Gulf, but to give a fresh impulse to that blessed religion whose very motto is "Peace on earth and good-will to men." We confidently expect that this storm, like other storms, will purify our atmosphere, and prepare us for a higher degree of national prosperity ; while we feel no less assured that the heart and the arm of the Church, instead of being paralyzed in the tempest, will emerge from it, nerved with fresh strength for spreading the Gospel of Peace, wherever there are human beings to see its light or to feel its power.

If I am asked then what is the peculiar significance of causing this splendid ensign of our nation's liberty to float here above the place where we come every Sunday to worship God, I answer, it is because we regard our country's cause as the cause of God—and never more so than now in this hour of her tribulation. We hereby declare that, while she lives in our warm remembrances always, she shall be especially associated with our solemn services ; that we will bear her on our hearts when we get nearest to the Throne ; that our minds shall be open to whatever words of truth and soberness, of admonition or encouragement, shall here be spoken concerning her ; and that, if we forget her here in this place of our solemnities, our right hand may forget her cun-

ning ; if we do not remember her, our tongue may cleave to the roof of our mouth. And what we are doing has a still further meaning, namely,—that we have the fullest confidence that our cause is a righteous cause ; and that the God whom we worship in this temple will make it his own, and that we shall have the evidence of this in its being finally triumphant. To what period the final issue may be postponed, or what may be the intervening difficulties, or dangers, or reverses, no mortal wisdom may be able even to conjecture ; but that the Government will stand, that the Union in its substantial integrity will be preserved, through God's gracious interposition in our behalf, we cannot, in the light that now shines around us, so much as doubt.

I remark, again, that this flag upon our church binds us to hold fast to our Christianity, both in its precepts and in its spirit, even in the prosecution of the conflict. I do not mean to suggest a doubt—for I have no such doubt—as to the propriety, nay, even the Christian obligation, of taking up arms in defence of our Government—it is indeed a most painful duty,—a duty from which we would gladly have been spared ; but it is a duty still, and therefore must be firmly and faithfully performed. But we must guard against the temptation to a malevolent and vindictive spirit. We must make all due allowance for the influences adverse to the formation of a correct judgment, under which our Southern brethren are now acting ; and we must inquire whether, if our souls were in their souls' stead, we might not be borne along by the same current that is sweeping *them* away. Among them are many whom some of us have long felt it a privilege to reckon among our most valued friends ; and much as we lament the sad mistake into which we believe they have fallen, let it not be our fault if they are not our friends still ; and let us hope that, when a brighter day shall be ushered in, there shall be nothing to prevent the return of the kindly intercourse of other days. I say again, the flag that we have been raising, and beneath which we expect, for some time to come, to worship God, will witness against us, if, when we bring our gift to the altar, we are secretly wishing that fire may descend from Heaven to consume our erring,

but yet no doubt for the most part honest, brethren, or that any evil may befall them which is not necessary to secure to them the highest ultimate benefit.

I must say, yet further, that the raising of this flag betokens the characteristic loyalty of our denomination to the government under which we live. The history of the protracted conflict that gave us our independence, is illuminated with many glorious names, that have also an honourable record in the history of the Presbyterian Church. Of those ministers whose hearts were full of patriotic fire, and who either served as Chaplains, or contributed largely in other ways to achieve the ultimate triumph, the names of Rodgers, Spencer, Roe, Patillo, McWhorter, Latta, Carmichael, and Duffield, occur to me at once. Caldwell and Rosbrugh were martyrs to the cause—the one being shot by a drunken soldier, the other barbarously assassinated, while he was on his knees, praying for the forgiveness of his murderers. Witherspoon, a hero both in Church and in State, one of the brightest theological lights of his day, or of any day, every body knows, was a member of the great Congress, and as such performed an act, by the writing of his name, which makes the whole tribe of autograph collectors well nigh crazy to obtain his signature. And the same patriotic spirit which the Presbyterian Church, in the person of some of her most distinguished clergymen, manifested, at the birth of our national liberty, she has manifested ever since in her loyal devotion to the interests of the country. A noble exhibition of it she has just made in the resolutions which have been passed, in her supreme judicatory, both in the Old School and in the New, commending our cause, as a righteous cause, to the favour both of God and of man. The spirit of Presbyterianism is essentially a loyal spirit ; and though some of our brethren whom we respect and honour, are, for the present, under the force of circumstances, drawn away in a different direction, we confidently predict that a change of times will restore to them the spirit of honourable devotion to their whole country.

But think not that I intend to praise the loyalty of our own denomination at the expense of that of others ; for our brethren

ren of all the other denominations are just as loyal, and just as bold and earnest in proclaiming their loyalty, as we are. My neighbour of St. Peter's, for instance, has been preaching for several Sundays, with the star-spangled banner waving above him ; and once at least the newspapers have furnished us the evidence that his heart was beating, warm and strong, to the noble sentiments which are there emblematically and so beautifully represented. And another of my respected brethren, of the same communion, (Mr. Reed,) has shown his devotion to his country's welfare, by the deliverance of an earnest and spirit-stirring appeal, first to his own charge, and then, through the press, to the whole community. And, what I should be least willing to forget,—our Roman Catholic friends have set the flag to flying from their vast and gorgeous church edifice on Arbor Hill ; so that one of the first objects that meets the stranger's eye in his approach to our city, tells him that our adopted citizens are as true as steel to the interests of the country which they have chosen as their home. Let us be thankful that there is one banner under which all denominations can unite,—the glorious, star-spangled banner ; that under this they can come together as so many separate regiments, constituting a mighty army, whose heart is as the heart of one man, in defence of the country's liberties.

There is one more thought, which it would be unjust alike to the occasion and to my own feelings to omit—*Who* originated the project of the raising of the flag ; and to whom are we indebted for the completion of it, and for all the grateful and jubilant associations which this occasion is to establish ? I answer, to a *lady*—and I would certainly go one step farther, if I did not know that she is within the sound of my voice, and were not afraid that she would think it an act of indelicacy, that I should not only thus publicly build a monument in honour of her patriotism, but actually inscribe her name upon it. There are two things, however, that I will venture to say of her, without pronouncing her name—one is that her early associations, and I believe her birthplace, are in the South—in the venerable old town where the gallant Ellsworth fell—the other is that her devotion to her country

is represented in another flag,—the work of her own hands, that ornaments one of our steamers, spreading to the breezes of the Hudson half a dozen times each week, and that this very afternoon is waving over the heads of the thousand soldiers whom we saw an hour ago marching through our streets to embark for their destination at the seat of war.* And the spirit that has wrought thus efficiently, thus honourably, I verily believe, animates the mass of our ladies. *Let it animate them* ; and let their wisdom, and their energy, and their perseverance, combine with their more persuasive and gentle qualities, to render them most efficient coadjutors with their husbands, and sons, and brothers, in sustaining the interests of a country which they love to honour, and which is itself honoured in being the land of their nativity. Let men and women emulate each other in their efforts to lift away the burden that oppresses, the dark cloud that overshadows. Every where let true Christian patriotism have her perfect work. And if any one's courage or hope begins to falter, let him turn his eye upward to our flag, waving beneath those two most absurd symbols of our New England origin,† and, having received a fresh baptism of the patriotic spirit, go on his way rejoicing.

* It may perhaps be pardonable to say here, what it was thought proper to withhold in the delivery, that the lady referred to is Mrs. Charles B. Redfield.

† The founders of this church, being nearly all emigrants from Massachusetts and Connecticut, oddly enough placed on the top of the steeple a *codfish* and a *pumpkin*, to represent the States from which they respectively came. *De gustibus non disputandum.*

